

FOUR SERMONS

PREACHED IN THE

CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S,
MARITZBURG,

BY

THE RIGHT REV. THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

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A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Evening, December 2, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

Is.ii.2-5. *And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the Mountain of the Lord's House shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. O House of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the light of the Lord.*

THE first three verses of this text will be found repeated again almost identically in the same words in the fourth chapter of the prophet Micah. It would seem that both Isaiah and Micah must have copied them from the writings of some older prophet, which were extant in their time, but are now lost. Micah cannot have taken them from Isaiah, because he gives another verse of the older prophecy, which Isaiah does not quote; and it is very unlikely that Isaiah should have copied it from Micah, because, though they lived in the same age, yet Isaiah was the older prophet of

the two, and would hardly have adopted the words of his junior. Besides which, the text was probably written in the lifetime of the idolatrous king Ahaz, to whose reign the mention in the sequel of the land being "full of idols," to which "the mean man bowed down and the great man humbled himself," seems distinctly to point, rather than to the time of the pious Hezekiah, who, we are told—

"removed the high places, and brake the images, and cut down the asheras, and brake in pieces the brazen serpent that Moses had made."

But Jeremiah, xxvi.18, quotes the very words of Micah, immediately before the passage we are now considering, and forming part of the same context, as having been prophesied "in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah."

There can be little doubt, then, as I have said, that both prophets have drawn the passage from the writing of some yet older prophet, which they had in their hands, but which have not come down to us. And we find here also expressed the same expectation about the glory reserved for Israel "in the last days," about which the prophets speak so frequently. Nothing, indeed, is here said about any Messiah or son of David, of whom, as we have heard, mention is first made in the prophecies of Isaiah and Micah. There is not even any reference to the House of David, such as we find in the prophet Amos, older than these. The language resembles more that of the most ancient prophet Joel, where he says—

"Ye shall know that I am Jehovah your God dwelling in Zion my holy mountain; then shall Jerusalem be holy, and there shall no strangers pass through her any more. And it shall come to pass in that day that the mountains shall drop down new wine, and the hills shall flow with milk, and all the rivers of Judah shall flow with waters, and a fountain shall come forth of the House of Jehovah, and shall water the acacia-valleys."

So here it is Mount Zion and Jerusalem, Jehovah's House, the House of the God of Jacob, that fills, as it were, the foreground of the vision. The prophet predicts a time, when the religion of Israel shall be embraced, the God of Israel be adored, by all nations,—when from all parts of the earth men shall come up to Jerusalem to worship, shall learn of Jehovah's ways, and walk in His paths,—and when, under Jehovah's government, the whole earth shall be at peace, and the "House of Jacob" shall be its glory and delight,—

"for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem."

Let us now consider this prophecy in the light of our own times.

(i) And, first, "the last days," which the prophet looked for, have never come, any more than those which the apostles and early Christians expected in their own lifetime,—at least, they have not come in the literal sense of the words, the sense in which the writer manifestly meant to use them. There are some indeed who speak of the 2000 years, which have already elapsed since the birth of Christ, as "the last days"; but for aught we know there may still be thousands or tens of thousands of years, during which the human race will live on upon earth *after* us, as they have lived before us. It is possible also, of course, to give a certain meaning to the phrase, by explaining "the last days" as being the days of the last dispensation—the last and highest revelation of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. And others, no doubt, will be ready to quote the saying—

"One day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day."

But this is to explain away such texts as those before us, not to accept them in the sense in which they were evidently used by our fellowmen. The apostles believed undoubtedly that the "last days" would be very short—that "the end of all things was at hand," and would come most probably in the lifetime of men then living. The prophets, though they put "the last days" at a greater distance, still looked for the restoration of glory and peace to Israel as an event not very far off; and, as time passed on, they were eagerly expecting the end of their night of gloom, the breaking forth of their day of triumph.

We have examined the records of the Hebrew prophets in the canonical books, first those before the Captivity, then those after it; and last Sunday we considered the indications of the general feeling of the Jews, a century and a half before the birth of Christ, which are given us in the Sibylline Verses and in the Book of Enoch,—two works, which though not contained in the Jewish Scriptures, either canonical or apocryphal, yet had undoubtedly great influence on many of the most devout minds in the early Church. So, too, the books in our Apocrypha are many of them deeply interesting and very important, as throwing light upon the hopes and expectations—and the religious condition generally—of Israel, as well as on some famous parts of their history, shortly before the coming of Christ. I have mentioned formerly that these books are all recognized as canonical by

the Roman Church, and almost all by the Greek Church—and some of them are even quoted as the inspired “Word of God,” in our own Church Homilies, though the Sixth Article says,—

The Church doth read them for example of life and instruction of manners, but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine.

At the present time, you will rarely find these books bound up in your Bibles, except in larger copies. None of them exist at present in Hebrew, though they were all composed originally in that tongue; we only possess them now in Greek and Latin translations. They were written for the most part between one and two centuries before Christ—with the exception of the second Book of Esdras, which we must consider separately on another occasion; and they may be regarded, therefore, as an echo of the general notions of that time.

In accordance with what we have noticed elsewhere in writings of this age, there is no mention whatever in these of the Messiah, as about to be revealed in “the last days.” In one of them the son of Sirach says of David,—

“The Lord took away his sins and exalted his horn *for ever*,” Ecclus.xlvii.11.

In another we read, 1 Mace.ii.57—

“David for being merciful possessed the throne of an *everlasting* kingdom.”

Baruch predicts the return of Israel to their own land, and says to Jerusalem—

“Lo, thy sons come, whom thou sentest away, they come gathered together from the east to the west by the word of the Holy One, rejoicing in the glory of God.” iv.37.

And so in another place we read, 2 Mace.ii.17,18—

“We hope also that God . . . as He promised in the Law, will shortly have mercy upon us, and gather us together out of every land under heaven into the holy place.”

It is said that Jehovah had “established His people *for ever*,” 2 Mace.xiv.15, and that—

“The days of the life of man may be numbered; but the days of Israel are *innumerable*.” Ecclus.xxxvii.25.

The conversion of all nations to the God of Israel is announced in plain terms:—

“Many nations shall come from far to the name of the Lord God, with gifts in their hands, even gifts to the King of Heaven.” Tob.xiii.11.

“All nations shall turn and fear the Lord God truly, and shall bury their idols. So shall all nations praise the Lord, and His people shall confess God, and the Lord shall exalt His people.” Tob.xiv.6,7.

They speak of horrible, never-ending, punishment for the enemies of Israel:—

“Woe to the nations that rise up against my kindred! The Lord Almighty will take vengeance of them in the day of judgment, in putting fire and worms in their flesh, and they shall feel them, and weep for ever.” Jud.xvi.17.

They expect that the saints—the pious Israelites—shall “judge the world”:—

“They shall judge the nations and have dominion over the people, and their Lord shall reign for ever.” Wisd.iii.8.

There is a reference also to Elijah, as, according to the prediction of Malachi, being about to come to appease the wrath of Jehovah before the judgment, Ecclus.xlviii.10. But in all this there is no reference whatever to the Messiah, the son of David. In the time of the Maccabees, and in the age following, the person of the Messiah is generally passed over in silence, or, if he is introduced at all, he is spoken of as a peaceable king, born as one of the people themselves, and reigning only after the final judgment. With some of the writers of this age the idea of the Messiah is, just as with the ancient prophets, little more than the hope of “a good time coming.” With others there is a strong expectation of a great final crisis, near at hand, at once both a conflict and a judgment, which will be followed by the resurrection of the Jews already dead, that so the chosen people—at least the *faithful* Israelites—may be united in the enjoyment of peace and blessedness for ever and ever.

(ii) But the text says—

“The Mountain of the House of Jehovah shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills.”

Insensibly, the phrases and the names which belong properly to Israel of old, as a people, have been appropriated by the Christian Church, and these words among the rest. Sometimes, this has ministered to fanaticism, and brought in the exclusive—even the ferocious—sentiments of early days into the midst of the professed followers of him, who was “meek and lowly in heart.” When Hildebrand, Pope Gregory VII—

proclaimed to every potentate, from the Baltic to the Straits of Gibraltar, that, all human authority being holden of the Divine, and God Himself having delegated His own sovereignty over men to the Prince of the Sacred College—meaning himself—a divine right to universal obedience was the inalienable attribute of the Roman Pontiffs, of whom, as the supreme earthly suzerain, emperors and kings held their crowns, patriarchs and bishops their mitres, and held them not mediately through each other, but immediately, from the one legitimate representative of the Great Apostle—

what was this but to put his own mistaken interpretation on the text before us, and others like them in the Bible—to say “the Mountain of the Lord’s House,” the Church, “shall be exalted above the hills,”—above all “Princes, Persons, Prelates, States, or Potentates,”—and I am established as earthly Head in the Church of Christ, and therefore as Lord and Ruler over all? And the same mistaken notion—the same in substance, though not perhaps in words pushed actually to the same extent—is entertained by many in our own land in this day, who set the Church above the State, the will of Ecclesiastics above the law of the land, the authority of Bishops or Priests in spiritual things above that of the Sovereign, representing the whole people, from which alone under God is derived all the power of the clergy to minister within the Church for the good of all.

No doubt, the people of Israel were indeed the Church of the Living God. We cannot look into the past, in the most cursory way, without seeing that the religious history of the Jew fills a central place in the history of man, that Judaism is the germ of Christianity, of the brightest, truest, most perfect, form of religion, that taught by the life and death of the Son of Man. And in saying this of Christianity, we prophesy, in fact, the future triumph and universal spread of that holy faith; we join in the song—

“the Mountain of Jehovah’s House shall be established in the top of the Mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills;”—

we profess our conviction that it will be one day recognized as such, that it will be one day seen to transcend all other doctrines concerning God, all other aspirations of mankind towards heaven, to rise above them and beyond them.

But this can only be said of the spirit of Christianity: “the letter killeth,” said our Lord himself. The Christianity manufactured in Church Councils, amidst ignorance and prejudice, in dark ages of credulity, of ascetic practices, ritualism, and mockery, has killed, indeed, abundantly, both the bodies and souls of men,—has made the Church Visible, not as Jerusalem the city of peace, but as Babylon “drunk with the blood of saints.” It has brought to men, not the glorious liberty of the children of God, but heavy chains for the intellect and conscience; it has come not as “a light to the Gentiles,” and salvation to the ends of the earth, but as “a darkness that might be felt,” with terrors of damnation and penal fires for all beyond the little circle of its own elect.

Nor can even the primitive, the apostolic, ages, be looked to for that pure doctrine concerning God and His relations to us, and ours to one another, which alone deserves the name of Christianity. They possessed it, indeed, but with alloy: they had the spirit; but in the letter, even with them, it was mixed and adulterated with human ignorance and imperfection. Thus St. Peter, we know, for a long time kept aloof from the Gentile believers, and could hardly be persuaded that the ceremonial uncleanness of the Jewish Law had been done away by the word of Christ making all things new. St. Paul, too, expected the immediate coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven,—

“in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

On many points also of moral teaching, as regards slavery, polygamy, and various parts of our duties as men and citizens, the genuine apostolic teaching was at least defective. The truths, which they may have held implicitly, had not as yet been fully developed, had not blossomed out into perfection. The course of ages since then—rather, let us say, the course of human education under the guidance of that Divine Spirit, from whom “every good and perfect gift” proceeds,—has by degrees more fully developed them.

Yes! we must go back to the Fountain Head itself to find true Christianity, as taught by the life and death of Christ himself, and expanded by the pious thought of ages. His life we shall indeed find to be our bright exemplar—his words to be pregnant with wisdom, on which eighteen centuries have but furnished a commentary. Yet still even here, as he himself teaches, it is not the mere words themselves—the “flesh,” the outward letter, of his teaching—which is the indestructible truth. His words are human words, and therefore subject to the limitations of our humanity—to the imperfections, to which all human utterances are liable, when used to express Eternal Truths. And, as his direct teaching was confined to the Jews, they were necessarily also cast, as it were, in Jewish moulds, and took the forms of the race and of the age in which he lived. It is the “spirit” of His teaching—the Light which shone in it—the Living Word that breathed in it—that “shall not pass away.” “He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”: he, whose heart is “honest and good,” will receive that Divine meaning, that spiritual food, that bread of life.

Whereas to others the very words of Jesus himself may be, as Origen says, a "killing letter"—may convey false notions concerning God and Man.

In every age the Holy Spirit of God has been communing with pious hearts. Not in the mazes of theological speculation only has He met and stilled the cravings which He Himself had excited, but in devout thought, adoration, thanksgiving, penitential self-surrender. All true Christian hearts have for centuries been fed by the life and death, the words and oracles, of him, who has manifested the Father to us. That manifestation has thus grown brighter and brighter, clearer and yet more clear, not in definitions or descriptions appealing to the intellect, but in the faith of the heart, the apprehension of truth, of love, of purity, of all that constitutes that moral perfection, which we cannot but ascribe to the Father of all, the "God of the spirits of all flesh."

It is Christianity, then, as taught by him who said,—

"Blessed are the meek—the merciful—the pure in heart—the peacemakers!"

"Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness!"

"Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake!"

and not the Christianity of Church Articles and Creeds,—

"which except a man do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly"—

it is Christ's Divine Religion, as taught by himself in life and in death, that is the Light which is to gladden all mankind. And they who strive to live in the spirit of that teaching, who strive to copy that blessed example, are true Christians, whatever their defects of creed may be, true followers of Christ, members of that "mystical body which is the blessed company of all faithful people," members of that true Church of the Living God, which "shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills."

(iii) And the text adds, "and *all nations* shall flow unto it." The prophet expects that from every part of the world "in the last days" crowds of worshippers will flock to the sacred hill of Zion—that "because of Jehovah's temple at Jerusalem, kings should bring presents unto Him"—that—

"Princes should come out of Egypt, and Ethiopia should stretch out her hands unto God." Ps.lxviii.29,31.

And this recognition of the God of Israel would really, as they believed, be the recognition also of Israel's own

greatness and glory—as the Psalmist says of “the King’s son,”—

“He shall have dominion from sea to sea,
And from the river unto the ends of the earth.
They that dwell in the wilderness shall bow before him;
His enemies shall lick the dust.
The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents;
The kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.
Yea, all kings shall fall down before him;
All nations shall serve him.” Ps.lxxii.8-11.

All these expectations were based upon the notion that Jehovah had a special fondness—a favour—for Israel, and that therefore the time would surely come at last, when all the earth would be at Israel’s feet. And the Christian Church has in all ages too much copied the exclusiveness of the Jew, believing that all who acknowledged the Son of God were for that reason alone more dear to the Father, more favoured by Him,—that all others, the multitudes of the heathen world, who knew not the name of Jesus, were of very secondary consideration in their Great Creator’s eyes, and that the doubters or heretics, within the Christian world, who did not name, it was supposed, that name aright, were altogether rejected, “nigh unto cursing, whose end was to be burned.” This is to reason about the God of Heaven as we do about men, with their limited faculties of love, their petty animosities, their private, personal aims and desires, their partial interests—who love and favour those who love and adhere to their children or friends, even for the sake of those dear ones. Such a notion is unworthy of the Great God our Saviour, the Father of all, the Infinite Spirit. It can only be tolerated as a distorted view of the undoubted truth, that those are indeed most near to God, most near to the true appreciation of the Divine Character, who behold Him in the Son of Man, and lovingly embrace that model of Divine Goodness, and devoutly strive to copy it.

Yes! only through Man can we behold God; only in a perfect man can we see the Image of the Holy One. This is of the essence of Christianity. This makes up with those two other great truths, the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man, a Divine Tri-unity of Christian Doctrine, each truth involving and implying the other two. And this religion is indeed the religion of Humanity; it must and will prevail, as it is more thoroughly understood, and realized in all its depth of meaning—as the human race itself progresses in wisdom and goodness.

(iv) And “all nations *shall flow unto it.*” They shall come willingly, gladly, to worship within the temple of the Living God—not as heavily ironed captives, dragged along in triumph after the conqueror’s car—not driven by terrors of everlasting torment, not forced in any way into compliance, but drawn by the very glimpses which they have had of the King in His beauty, though very far off, seen by the clear shining of the Sun of Righteousness into their hearts, the Light of God in their reason and conscience. All attempts to compel belief by penalties of any kind, the fires of Smithfield or the fires of hell, are utterly unworthy of the gospel of Christ. Does your dearest friend, your sister or your brother, think differently with you on religious subjects? Do not withdraw from him in the least your affection, your confidence, your admiration, your ready sympathy or help. If, misled by fanatical notions, he curse you, yet bless him: if he separate you from his company, be careful that no stone in the wall of estrangement be laid by your hands. It is excusable in those, who have idols, to fight for them and to fear their fall—even darkly and half-unconsciously to fear that the words, the very breath, of others should succeed in dislodging them from their own hearts, in making desolate their little cherished Sanctuary. We ought to feel for them, to excuse their violence and their bitterness, to spare them when we can. But we, who worship the One Living and True God, whose throne is the pure heart alone,—we who are sure that all truth is one, and comes from One, and that no *discoveries* can make it otherwise than brighter and clearer,—what excuse have we for violence, for bitterness? We may be energetic and firm in defending our political and social rights, our liberty of speech as well as of action; but no human hand can put a fetter on “the glorious liberty of the children of God,” and we can afford to smile at all attempts to do so. At any rate, it should be our principle and aim to set forth that which we believe, we know, to be true, not with violence and bitterness, not with unfair attacks on others, and misrepresentation of their acts and motives,—but by simple “manifestation of the truth commending ourselves to every man’s conscience in the sight of God.”

(v) But the text proceeds—

“And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the Mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob.”

There is an allusion here most probably to the Jews going up to Jerusalem from different parts of the land at their great festivals—perhaps, also to multitudes of proselytes, coming from foreign lands, to swell the mighty company, who should crowd the temple-courts at Jerusalem, and cheer each other on the way to worship on the sacred hill of Zion. The idea is beautiful enough; but a little consideration would show it to be unpractical, impracticable—as many beautiful ideas have proved. It has always been the dream of many in the Christian Church that unity must consist in belonging to one outward visible Church, in repeating the same creeds and using the same formularies. The Roman Church, we know, has tried to enforce such unity, and has even sought to confine the flock in public prayer to the use of one language. But there are many, even in our own Church, who, mistaking utterly the nature of true Christianity, confound “unity” with “uniformity,” and are anxious to compel the preacher to utter, and the people to believe, not that which is true, but that which is orthodox.

No! unity, the true unity of Christian people, is a thing of the heart and spirit: it cannot be secured by outward expressions, by uniformity of creed or ritual, nor can it be exhibited in this way. A man shall possess the most orthodox creed, and yet be at heart an utter schismatic, rending asunder the body of Christ by harsh, uncharitable judgments, by public misstatements, by secret whisperings. Another shall be altogether unsound and heretical, as many count heresy,—yea, a very heathen, as Soerates or Cicero of old,—and yet be more at one with Christ, be living more in the spirit of Christ, the spirit of truth, the spirit of love.

Unity, then, must be spiritual, and only in a very limited sense a thing of time and space: even as the spiritual presence of the Son of Man, the sense of an oneness of spirit with him, is felt wherever two or three are gathered together in his name; while his bodily presence could only be realized within a certain space and a certain time. But it is refreshing indeed when we are able to enjoy to the full, in active personal intercourse, the Brotherhood of men, the Communion of Saints, the joy which in its highest form our own poet has so well described—

For what delights can equal those
Which stir the spirit's inner deeps,
When he who loves, but knows not, reaps
A truth from him who loves and knows?

This is a special blessing, which true Christianity, that cares only for truth, not at all for mere orthodoxy, provides for those who embrace it with all their hearts. We must live in charity with those who differ; we must bear, if need be, with the intolerance of the weak; but we may also rejoice in the sympathy of those who in the main see eye to eye with us, who recognize the same precious truths that we do, who "go up" with us together to worship in the House of the Living God.

There is, I trust and believe, a large increase of this communion of souls in this our day. When forms of belief are idolized, a dread of "heresy," of differing from the rest on any, even the smallest, point, imposes silence, the silence of fear, upon everyone, who cannot think in fetters, whose thoughts will not always fit into the old formulæ. Indeed, whenever we realize, perhaps for the first time, any truth, however common, it seems, as it were, too big for the words which hold it; we crave some other words in which to express it, some new vesture for the immortal guest. Hence many so-called heresies have arisen, which after-times and after-thought have shown to be old, familiar truths—only drest afresh. But as the old bugbear of heresy falls away, and all begin to speak freely one to another that which God has given each to see,—to speak, as "with new tongues," yet each freely in his own language, "as the Spirit shall give him utterance," the "wonderful works of God,"—without fear of opprobrious names, of clerical interference with the sacred rights of families, of Church censures and anathemas in any form,—how blessed it is to see and know that many holy bonds of common thought may be knit between the members of each family-circle, as they never would have been under the shade of an enforced, but superficial, conformity! "The thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed," said the aged saint, as we read in the Gospel, when he held the holy child in his arms. And such has been the case in a measure in every age, when great truths, which have long been suppressed, have at length in God's appointed time burst the restraining bonds, and gone forth among men, conquering and to conquer. What a joy it is when those, whom nature and providence have made one, can be fellow-helpers of each other's *spiritual* joy, can commune freely with each other on eternal truths, can build up each other's faith in God! What priest or teacher might

interfere with such communion, or seek to part asunder, with unhallowed hand, hearts which a common love of God and Man has joined together? What father would not, might not, ought not, in these days of enlightenment aim to be—rather claim to be—what God means him to be, the Priest and Prophet too within his own home-circle, where all are dear to him, and he is loved and honored by all?

(vi) “And He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths; for out of Zion shall go forth the Law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem.”

Here is the source of all light, of all wisdom, of all knowledge of God, of all that it most concerns man to know—“God shall teach us,”—God shall communicate Himself to man, or man could never, by means merely of those faculties which inform him of the external world, have known Divine Truth, have known the right, the good, the Righteous Judge, the Good and Gracious God. If once we recognize our Father as teaching us thus, and look to Him also, who speaks in our hearts and consciences, as the Author of Nature, the Ruler of the Universe, we may—we must—accept every increase of knowledge of every kind as a gift from Him, for the due use and improvement of which we shall be held responsible to the Giver. We may and must believe, for instance, that in the increased knowledge of this our day concerning nature, concerning the laws of man’s health and wellbeing, concerning the Great Creator’s works in the fields of space, in the deep foundations of the earth, in the universe of living things that people it, down to the infinite littlenesses revealed by the microscope, we see Him “teaching us” ever “of His ways.”

And we must seek to “walk in His paths.” In other times, when pestilences swept over the earth, and all the physicians and the magicians too were baffled, the believing population had recourse to prayer. And prayer at such a time is good, if its blessed effect is to soothe and strengthen the heart to endure patiently the Heavenly Will, and meanwhile to do what the clearer knowledge of God’s ways, vouchsafed in these times, proclaims to be our duty, in striving to check the progress of the plague, as well as ministering to the necessities of those of our fellowmen who suffer from it. To leave the discoveries of medical and social Science neglected, the laws of Nature disregarded,—those laws which have “gone forth” from God’s glorious dwelling-place, that “word of the Lord” which has come to instruct

and quicken this present age,—and to fall upon our knees, when we ought to be doing our work at His bidding,—would clearly be to mock God, to refuse to listen to His Voice and to obey it.

(vi) “And He shall judge among the nations, and rebuke many people; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more.”

The way to peace, you see, the prophet felt, was through judgment—the rebuke of many striving nations: there must be “wars and rumours of wars,” before the blessed end would come. And so to a true unity of heart and feeling, in matters of religion, the needful prelude is an unbounded latitude of speculation. Truth is one, and all true hearts will come round to it *at last*. The severest trial of any doctrine is to “let it alone,” and, if it is not of God, it will “come to nought.” But, at first, says our Lord himself, “I am come not to send peace, but a sword.” Divisions, dissensions, discussions, seemingly endless, seemingly multiplying themselves for ever, must exist, if for no other reason, to show this at all events, that the life of man does not consist in holding correct opinions in matters of religion, with respect to which the most loving souls, the most true in act and pure in heart, may differ, but in having our wills conformed to the Will of God, in having formed in us the Mind that was in Christ, in having our spirits led by the Spirit of God.

Still true Christianity tends to peace. The faith, which regards God as a Father, cannot conceive of Him as casting out His children from His Presence, from life and from hope, on account of their mistakes concerning Him, on account of errors in their creeds. And so, wherever the life is seen to be upright, loving, and pure, true Christian charity will recognize the work of the Divine Spirit there, will infer that purity of heart, to which alone—and not to any orthodoxy of creed—the vision of the All-Holy One, the more perfect knowledge of God, is promised by Christ himself.

(vii) Yes! to this last—this practical—conclusion, we must come, with which the prophet expresses his own feelings, after quoting those words of the ancient oracle.

“O House of Jacob, come ye, and let us walk in the Light of the Lord!”

Come, brethren, and let us walk in our Father’s Light. This is the one thing needful for all of us. “If we will do

the Will of God, we shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God." Having the Light so freely and graciously vouchsafed to us, in this our day, more freely and fully than in any former age—let us answer to the Love of God in giving it—let us walk in the Light, as He is in the Light—bringing our actions daily to the Light that we may know that they are wrought in God—"casting off daily the works of darkness, and putting on the armour of Light."

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, December 9, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

ROM. xv. 5-7. *Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded toward one another according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*

IN the words before the text St. Paul has been speaking of the source of strength and consolation, which our merciful God and Father has provided for us in the Holy Scriptures.

“For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

Of course, he was speaking only of the Scriptures of the Old Testament; for these only at that time were written; or, if some of St. Paul's own letters, and even it may be some portions of the present Gospels, were already in existence, yet these could not have been reckoned by him among the “things” of which he here speaks, as “written aforetime.” He is referring, then, to the Hebrew Scriptures, or, rather, to the Greek translation of them, the Septuagint Version, differing materially in some places from the Hebrew, which he evidently had in his hands and used habitually, since he continually quotes from it. And he probably included the *apocryphal* books, which are translated as Holy Scripture in that Version, and which are indeed recognized

as such by the Greek and Roman Churches, and even in our own Church Homilies. He would have said, no doubt, that all writings of good men and true of all ages are—

“profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness”—

and being such are “divinely inspired.” He would have blessed God devoutly for any light of any kind shed upon his mind from any quarter, and recognized in all the gracious “Father of lights” as the giver.

Here, however, as I have said, he is referring expressly to the writings of the Old Testament, to the treasures of Divine instruction and consolation, which the good Providence of God has laid up there for His children in all future ages, having “caused,” as our Collect says this day, “all holy Scriptures to be written for our learning.” Here we have the undoubted records of the thoughts, the pious musings, the most sacred feelings, of men who lived long ago, thousands of years at least before we were born upon the earth. Generations upon generations of living men have called upon God, as we call upon Him now. They thirsted after the Fountain of all Goodness and Truth. They trusted in Him as their Helper and Deliverer—nay, as their very Father and Friend. They turned from the accusing and tormenting voice within them to the Unchangeable Goodness. They said to Him, against whom they felt they had sinned, “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”

Thus these ancient writings are the records of men’s experience in days long gone by. And, as we read, we sympathise with these our fellowmen, and feel our hearts strengthened by their faith, our love and hope kindled by theirs. But they are not preserved by some happy accident alone. Granted that these alone survive now out of many such books which once existed, and of which we find mention in the Bible itself, such as “the Book of the Wars of Jehovah,” “the Book of Jasher,” “the Book of the Acts of Solomon,” the Books of Nathan, Shemaiah, Jehu, and many others,—granted also that there are some defects in our present Scriptures, and a multitude of various readings,—that the writings of a later prophet are mixed up with those of Isaiah, and of an earlier with those of Zechariah,—that great differences exist between the Hebrew, as we now have it, and the Greek which represents the Hebrew, as it lay in the hands of the translators, two or three centuries before

the birth of Christ,—admitting all this, which cannot be denied by any that have an intelligent acquaintance with the subject, such as all Christians should have in the present day of general enlightenment,—yet here we have the records of God's dealings with men in the far-distant past, preserved to us by a gracious providence; we see here the lessons of Divine Wisdom vouchsafed to them, and which they learned; and, though ours may be a page farther on in the Great System of Divine Instruction, which the Finger of God has traced for the education of the race, yet our lesson of to-day contains theirs, as the last pages of any manual of learning imply and comprise what has gone before. And the wise care of Him who did—

“predestinate us to be conformed to the image of His Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren”—

who has given us “the adoption of sons,” and, “because we are sons,”—

“hath sent forth the spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying Abba, Father”—

has preserved these records of the Divine Life in the souls of living men from age to age, has taught us thus that we are one with them in the embrace of Him who loves and cares for us all.

For have we not herein a proof of the same Fatherly Love, brooding all along over the whole race, of the same Divine Word enlightening the hearts of our fellowmen in all ages, of the same Holy Spirit breathing life into all? Not only is each individual cared for by the Living God, as we know full well by our own experience, but we see also that the race is cared for—that the whole human race, to the welfare and progress of which that of each individual man, without being set aside and cast away, must yet be subordinate, is the special and peculiar object of His attention, of His tender mercy, of His wise discipline. This is the “heir,” who is to inherit all things, all the riches of the Goodness and Wisdom of God, but is kept “under tutors and governors, until the time appointed by the Father.” It is for him that the power of speech has been granted, and the art of writing in God's due time revealed, that men, not only of the same age and country, but of all countries and of all times, may converse together in their different languages, speaking to one another through all in that strange spiritual tongue, which all “of every nation under heaven” can understand, whose hearts are “led by the Spirit of God.”

And so the Bible has come down to us—

“that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

No doubt, the Divine Teacher can teach the hearts of men without the Bible—does teach them now in heathen lands, as He taught them in the days of old. No doubt, also, in Christian lands there are multitudes who cannot read, or, if they read, are, like the Ethiopian eunuch, unable to understand what they read, and need the voice of their fellowman, the living teacher, as God’s minister, to teach them to read and use the Book aright, that so they may “draw water with joy from these wells of salvation.” But in Christian lands, in the present day—at least in our own land—all society, from the highest to the lowest, is penetrated with its influences. All our literature breathes, so to speak, of the Bible. The very language of common life teems with innumerable phrases and forms of thought, which are derived from it, which shows what a mighty power it has been in the training of men, what an influence it has exerted for good—or for evil.

Yes! for evil, alas! as well as for good. For have not some of the most atrocious crimes, that have stained the records of human history, been based on Scripture, misread or misapplied? Has not Scripture authority been confidently quoted for the burning of witches, for the maintenance of slavery? Upon what were the Pope’s claims founded, to lord it as God’s viceregent over all the earth,—to strip kings of their thrones, and lay their countries under interdicts,—to give the bodies of men in heathen lands, as well as their gold, to the bloodhounds of Spain,—but upon words of Scripture, misunderstood, yet assumed, as so explained, to be Divine and infallible—

“I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven”?

Was not Scripture authority quoted abundantly against the martyrs of the Reformation? And equally by not a few of the Reformers—as Calvin—against those whom *they* deemed heretics? What was the paper which Galileo signed on June 22, 1633, and which, as many of you may have never seen or heard the actual words, I will quote, very slightly abridged:—

I, Galileo Galilei, of the age of 70, being on my knees in the presence of your most eminent and most reverend Lords Cardinals of the Universal Christian

Commonwealth, Inquisitors General against heretical depravity, swear that I have always believed, and now do believe, and, God helping me, will for the future always believe, whatever the Holy Catholic and Apostolic Roman Church holds, preaches, and teaches. But, because this Holy Office had enjoined me by precept entirely to relinquish the false dogma, which maintains that the sun is the centre of the world and immoveable, and that the earth is not the centre and moves, and not to hold, defend, or teach by any means, by speech or by writing, the aforesaid false doctrine, and, after it had been notified to me that *the aforesaid doctrine is repugnant to the Holy Scripture*, I have written and printed a book, in which I treat of the same doctrine already condemned, and adduce very strong reasons in favour of it, not offering any solution of them, therefore I have been vehemently suspected of heresy, namely, that I maintained and believed that the Sun is the centre of the world and immoveable, and that the Earth is not the centre and moves.

Therefore, being willing to take out of the minds of your eminencies, and of every Catholic Christian, this vehement suspicion justly conceived against me, I with sincere heart and faith unfeigned abjure, execrate, and detest the aforesaid errors and heresies; and I swear that I will never any more hereafter say or assert, by speech or writing, any thing through which the like suspicion may be had of me. But, if it shall happen that I shall go contrary (which God avert!) to any of my words, promises, protestations, and oaths, I subject myself to all the penalties and punishments, which have been enacted and promulgated against such delinquents. So help me God, and His holy Gospels, on which I now lay my hands!

But was not this precisely the same ignorant and intolerant spirit, as that which in the early days of many of us characterised the discoveries of geology as wicked, false, anti-Scriptural, tending only to infidelity and atheism,—which thirty years ago covered an eminent Divine, still living, with foul streams of abuse and calumny, because he had felt obliged to abandon the traditionary view of some parts of the story of the Exodus,—and which now in our days urges on men,—who will speak that honored name with reverence, who will never move a finger to touch one, standing so high in place and reputation, who will fraternize freely with him in private friendly intercourse, and public religious solemnities,—to denounce others, who are but reading a page further on in the Great Book of human development, as dangerous and deadly hereties?

It is not sufficient, therefore, that we have the Bible, preserved by the Goodness of God for our use: we must be taught to read it thoughtfully and intelligently—with the understanding, as well as with the heart. It is the special work of the present day to cast more light upon the origin and history of our Sacred Books, their ages and their authors, that we may learn to estimate more truly the nature of the blessing, which the Goodness of God has provided for us, by giving us these relics of the religious life of past ages. From the lapse of time, and the loss or the complete waste

of materials, it has become an exceedingly toilsome and difficult labour to attain to absolute certainty on many of these points, though much has been done in our own lifetime to clear up questions that were very dark to our fathers. If we are true Christians, true servants of the God of Truth, true believers in a Living God who overrules all, and is present to bless His children in every age, we shall thankfully receive each ray of light which He sends us, as the reward of patient, faithful labour, our own or that of our brethren. And as for those who would frown upon and check such efforts, who will brand the labourers with evil names, and do the utmost, which the age allows, to crush and silence them, it can only be said, when we take into account the frightful results—not only in the past, but even in the present day—of an ignorant fanatical adherence to traditionary views of Scripture authority, that such men, however unconsciously, are yet, in fact, “enemies of the human race,”—enemies to its true progress in Scriptural “learning,” in proportion to the advancement which the age has made in learning of all other kinds,—hinderers of its joy, preventing in innumerable minds, whose eyes are opened to the grand results of scientific research, the realisation of the Gracious Purpose of God, in giving us the Bible—

“that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope.”

By reading the Scriptures, then, we are to learn “patience”—or, rather, “perseverance, endurance.” And surely this is the natural result of seeing that other men in other days have climbed with toil from height to height,—have slipped back, at times, and sunk, have sinned, and suffered bitter remorse in consequence, and yet have not despaired, have felt in the darkness for the Unknown Friend of their spirits, wailing, like children for the mother’s breast, and then have found again that Blessed Presence with them and near them, and rested in His Love. Why, then, should we despair—why be shut off or cast away? Our fathers’ God is our God;—

“The everlasting God, Jehovah, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary.”

Man has not tried out the Divine Patience: His Ear is still inclined to us, His Arm stretched out to save us. How many can rush onwards patiently and hopefully in a band, whose strength would fail them, and their hearts give way, if they had to walk alone!

But, besides the help ministered to us by the Bible in this way, by the encouraging example of others, who have fought the good fight before us and entered into their rest,—more especially by that brightest of all examples, which the New Testament sets before, in the blessed life and death of the Son of Man,—there is also the direct “comfort of the Scriptures,” the strength and support ministered to us by the living words of exhortation, the promises and pledges of Divine assistance, which our fellowmen, the prophets of old, have uttered in the ears of their brethren, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. Not because the words of the Bible are every one of them infallibly true, so that to find one line or letter of them untrustworthy or untrue, would be to lose all hope for time and for eternity, as a Bishop of our Church has said,—not for this reason, but because they speak words of Eternal Truth by that Spirit, the Spirit of God which we also “have received, that we may know the things that are freely given to us of God,”—because they speak to our hearts and consciences, wakening the echoes of our own inner being, bringing their own witness to our hearts that they come with a message from God to the soul. Such promises, such words of “comfort,” as these, which our drooping, thirsting, souls are longing for, and which at times we hear whispered within us by the Gracious Voice of that Living Comforter, who is ever present with us, come home to us with a freshness and power of peculiar efficacy, when they are uttered from without, when the same thoughts, which revive and cheer our spirits now, are found to have been cherished by “the holy men of old,” taught by the selfsame Spirit as we.

And thus by this “comfort of the Scriptures,” ministered in both ways, we “may have hope,” says the apostle. We have something within us which assures us that the hopes, which God Himself has inspired, He will not disappoint. Generosity even amongst men consists—at least, in part—in not failing those who cling to us, whom we have encouraged and caused to cling to us by our own professed characters, if not by our actual words and deeds. It seems too sad, and even degrading to ourselves, to disappoint them, to deceive them, to betray their trust. Who, that respects himself, that knows his fellowmen, can bear to do so? And something of this kind we cannot help ascribing to God, from whom ourselves and all our good and true impulses

proceed. The Bible, in fact, is full of this feeling, showing that men of old have thought and felt as we do now. The blessedness of those who trust in the Lord, who hope in His Mercy, is the keynote of the Psalms.

"Our fathers trusted in Thee; they trusted, and Thou didst deliver them. They cried unto Thee and were delivered; they trusted in Thee, and were not confounded."

And so we read in a beautiful passage of the Apocryphal books—

"Look at the generations of old and see! Did ever any trust in the Lord, and was confounded? Or did any abide in His fear, and was forsaken? Or whom did He ever despise that called upon Him? For the Lord is full of compassion and mercy, long-suffering, and very pitiful, and forgiveth sins, and saveth in time of affliction." Ecclus.11.10,11.

Thus we have ground for *hope*, simply because we *desire*, when we feel that our desires are worthy desires, worthy of ourselves as God's children, worthy of Him who made us, and made us with such desires, made us even for them. And our hope is yet more strengthened and brightened, when we read how other men of other times have also hoped for what earth could not give them, and when all earthly help and hope had been withdrawn from them.

Faith, indeed, comes first, as the spring of hope, the root of all virtue: we must believe that "God is, and is the rewarder of them that diligently seek Him," before we can come to Him with a joyful, lifegiving hope. Without faith, in fact, in some form, man would live for sense, and in time alone; he would be like the brutes that perish. But hope, which seems a natural instinct in humanity, amidst all present darkness and through all present suffering, when it springs out of faith, makes so large a portion of the life of the Spirit, that St. Paul ranks it as the second of the great tri-unity, that make up practical Christianity,—"Now abideth faith, hope, charity." The "joy" and "peace," which flow from a sense of Divine Favour, are sometimes withheld, are obstructed or obscured for a time even by physical causes, by the state of health, by disturbance of the nervous system. The cares of this life also, its crowding anxieties and troubles, like clouds of the lower atmosphere, may make it hard, if not impossible, to rise into that clear region, which is always full of the sunshine of God's Countenance. Still "hope" remains,—

"like an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and entering into that within the vail."

We hope for that we see not, for that which we cannot realize to ourselves, for what is too dim, too far off, too uncertain, for us to rejoice in, and yet we can rest upon it. We can hope—having faith in God's Goodness, in His Love—that His work will be done in us and by us, that the "desire of our souls" which, in spite of all our faults and failings, is still "to His Name," to "the remembrance of Him," will be fulfilled, in the time and manner that His Wisdom sees to be best.

Thus, then, though "joy" and "peace" are unspeakable blessings, and nowhere so plentifully poured into the soul as in the Church of Christ, yet they may both be withheld for a time—and for the wisest of reasons. As Leighton somewhere says—

It is hard to carry a full cup with an even hand: too much joy, even spiritual, would make us wanton.

But when "joy" and "peace" may be withdrawn, "faith and hope," thank God! will still remain. And out of these two the Christian character itself, which is "charity," may be developed, nourished, and sustained—charity, the "greatest of these three," as St. Paul himself says, that very spirit of Christ, without which we are none of his. Let us beware lest we lose that Divine Life, that love for God and Man, in the atmosphere of theological controversy. How, indeed, can it coexist with the spirit, which sees an enemy of God in everyone whose faith is faltering, or to our thinking erroneous? Yet, as it is a thing divine and supernatural, a thing of heavenly birth, let us believe that it may still survive at least, not altogether choked, however checked and dwarfed—not wholly extinguished—even in the hearts of persecutors who "know not what they do"; and let us "receive" even these, if need be, "to the glory of God."

For in the text St. Paul goes on to speak of another source of consolation.

"The God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another."

He, who made us for Himself, has made us also for each other, or rather He has made us so dependant on each other, that faith is imperfect, as a source of strength and comfort, while it remains in one single heart. And so the apostle speaks to the Christians at Rome in this epistle of being "comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me." In all matters, whether of sense or of faith,

we need the testimony of our fellowmen to confirm our own impressions, otherwise they might pass for delusions, for mere subjective forms or feelings, the manufacture of the fancy, which have led captive the senses or the intellect. But, when others too believe, when others see and feel a real objective truth, we surmise inevitably a something without us and beyond us, a something which has a real existence. In the world of sense we have the daily and hourly witness of our fellows to all that we see or feel. The sun rises not for us alone; but all creation smiles back upon him, all men "go forth to their work and to their labour till the evening." How much more in spiritual things, to which the soul is not always awake, which the mere animal man ignores, is the testimony, the sympathy, of our fellowmen felt to be precious and needful! God is assuredly in *every* obedient faithful heart. But, when the faithful and obedient meet together, and speak His praise, speak of His mighty works, "His wonderful doings to the children of men," then is He most emphatically present. His single champions go out in His Might, if need be, against the powers of darkness, and the Lord is their shield and helmet, yea, their high tower and defence. But when the hosts of God go forth together, together doing God's Will, seeking to advance His Work, desiring to grow in the knowledge and love of His truth,—when many sons of God, with but one heart, are engaged together in the Holy War, to put down evil of every kind, to drive out error, to banish ignorance and superstition—to do this, not by the weapons of this world, but by the weapons of the heavenly warfare, the "sword of the Spirit, which is" the word of truth, "the Word of God," that so "faith" and "hope" may have room to grow, and expand into "charity,"—then indeed is God glorified, "even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ," and the grace which fills each heart flows over into that of his brother, and—

"the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love."

St. Paul, then, tells us, that in this way also "the God of patience and consolation" will bestow those blessings upon us, by making us "likeminded one toward another," and so helpers of each other's joy. God teaches us indeed by the past. A thoughtful student will see the traces of the Divine Hand everywhere in history. The experiences of other men

in distant times will plainly reveal to him the presenee with them, whether acknowledged or not, of the Father and Friend of all. But not only so does He strengthen us, and bind up our hearts and minds to do His Will. He has not forsaken His own world: He is with His children *now*, as He was of old, and will be to the end of time. *Now* we may see on every side, if only we will look, the signs of God's work and of His Presence with us. Where some lament over the decay of faith, and the sinking into the dust of old and honoured traditions, let us recognize the work of the Great Educator, inciting His children to search after the truth, to search after the fact, and to leave fables and fancies to the comparatively childish past. When, meeting together in this spirit, we find in our friends and fellowmen the same earnest longing for Truth, the same firm trust in the God of Truth, before the Light of whose Countenance all shadows shall flee away, we learn afresh the meaning of that "Communion of Saints," which is indeed an old article of our Creed, but which perhaps we left amongst things unrealized, from an unwillingness to rank our faulty selves as saints, as holy persons. Yet are not all men faulty, more or less? And is there not a fountain of Goodness and Purity, ever flowing from the Divine, the Infinite, Being, and irradiating all those who seek His Presenee, who desire to "walk in the Light of the Lord"? Do we not see the tokens of our family-likeness to one another, as children of one Father, "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty"?

As such, then, we are to be "likeminded to one another." Mere intellectual similarity is not to bound our sympathy. The most precious gifts, which we have from above, are not those which culture and education bring to light, or the riches of the imagination, which some inherit so largely, and which others do not even dream of. These would be but as a diadem of jewels upon the head of a lifeless statue, but for that faith in the Living God, which the weakest intellects may have with the strongest. And that Living God, the Holy One and Fountain of Holiness, dwells with every humble faithful worshipper, however mean in men's eyes, and even where His temple has hardly yet begun to be raised. When humanity may be so low, that we ponder the difference between it and the higher orders of brutes, still it is the same nature which He has framed to be the future temple of His Spirit. In all our fellowmen, therefore,

simply as such, we must recognize the offspring of God, the recipients of Divine Light and Life; we must "honour all men," if we would be "like-minded" towards them. All are dear to God, even the most abject, and must therefore be dear to us. The most gifted and most brilliant among our fellowmen are our brothers and sisters in God's great Family; their triumphs and their gifts are ours and for us; there is no room for envy or jealousy. All the efforts of genius, the discoveries of science, are ours: they are the inheritance of God's children, the riches and the ornaments of our Father's House. But so, too, we ought, as members of one Family, to bear with the "little-ones," the ignorant, the feeble. Even the prodigal must not be cast out from our hearts; but his return must be desired and longed for, his returning steps be met by ours, hastening to bring him back. We must be ready to rejoice over him, as one whom we have mourned as lost and dead to us, and not with cold Pharisaic frown rise up to bar the door, that we may enjoy our own atmosphere of untainted purity. Much less must we presume to erect barriers between ourselves and others, who truly love God and serve Him, according to their light, in words and deeds of truth and charity, barriers composed of creeds and catechisms, of articles of faith or forms of prayer. Such things must be, and they have their use for some, if not for all. But they ought not to separate one child of God from another. There must be differences in that Great Family, as each little family on earth displays them, differences of temperament, of mental power, even of opportunities of instruction. But the parent's love embraces all alike, the genius, as it were, of the family, who bears the rest upon his wings, the infant, or even the unhappy one, whom some mental infirmity may sequester from the rest.

To be thus "likeminded towards one another" will be, says the apostle, "according to Christ Jesus," and he explains his meaning more fully by adding—

"Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us, to the glory of God."

The Church of Rome was composed of Jewish and Gentile proselytes. None were excluded on account of their former faith or calling; nor in those apostolic days do we see any sign of men being excommunicated, because they did not agree together in holding all the subtleties of all the Creeds. And even as Christ himself, or the apostles in

Christ's name, received all "the weary and heavy-laden" who came to him for rest, bade them only "take his yoke upon them," and "learn of him" to be meek and merciful, loving, and pure in heart, so must each individual Christian merge his own special likeings and prejudices in one grand thought, that here is a brother or sister, a son or daughter of the Lord Almighty; he must "receive" all sincere, true-hearted men, whatever their faith may be, whose lives are right. Being himself begotten of God, and loving Him that begat, he must love whatever is begotten of Him, wherever he sees it, all that is "true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report, if there be any virtue, if there be any praise."

How grand it will be, when this principle is recognized fully within the bounds of our National Church, which indeed would then have no bounds but the Nation itself—nay, when it is recognized also without it, when the religion of Christ shall be no longer, as now it is made to be, a faith which separates good men and true, but, as God meant it to be, a faith that unites the whole human family in the love of God and Man. Then, indeed, shall we—

"With one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ."

This was the end for which Christ came—to glorify God. And this must be the end of all our teaching. How much more truly would this be gained, if men did but fix their eyes steadily upon it, instead of striving to save their own souls, and therefore fighting for orthodoxy of creed, lest they should "not be saved"—if instead of contending furiously, and rending the body of Christ, about forms of belief and worship, or systems of Church Government, we were all ready to "receive" one another, to "bear" with one another, to "believe" in one another, wherever we see the life to be good and true, "hoping all things, enduring all things"—if we were all, as I trust some are, "likeminded one towards another according to Christ Jesus," meeting in friendly intercourse, in mutual cooperation, each with the gifts which the other lacks,—seeking to advance the education of white and black, to promote all measures of social improvement, to purify our own lives and the lives of our families, to consult the truest welfare of the whole community, and so do all to "the glory of God."

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, December 16, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

ACTS xvi.30,31. *And he brought them out and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.*

How very different is this language from that of the Athanasian Creed, which has acquired with many, who are unacquainted with its true history, an authority only second to that of the Bible itself, as something sacred, almost divine! In reality, when we read this Creed, as the existing laws of our Church require us to do at certain seasons of the year, we are carried far away for the moment into a very different atmosphere from that of the present age, and very different from that of the apostolic times. Just so there are many of the Psalms, which breathe a fierce and unforgiving spirit, not altogether alien to the spirit of Judaism, but very unlike that of the mild Son of Man, the meek and gentle Jesus. We feel this often while repeating in our services the language of the old Hebrew poet, in which, in direct contradiction to the teaching of the New Testament, he curses, instead of blessing, those who curse him, and imprecates evil, instead of "praying for" those who "despitefully use him and persecute him"—as where we read this morning—

"Pour out thine indignation upon the heathen that have not known Thee. . .
O let the vengeance of thy servants' blood that is shed be openly showed upon

the heathen in Thy sight. . . And for the blasphemy, wherewith our neighbours have blasphemed Thee, reward Thou them, O Lord, sevenfold into their bosom." Ps.lxxix.6,11,13—

or where we find him saying in a yet more unforgiving strain :

" Let Satan stand at his right hand, and let his prayer be turned into sin ; let his children be fatherless, and his wife a widow ; let there be no man to pity him, nor to have compassion on his fatherless children ; let the wickedness of his fathers be had in remembrance in the sight of the Lord, and let not the sin of his mother be done away,"—

or when again he cries with a savage shout of exultation, most discordant and dreadful in our ears—

" The righteous shall rejoice when he seeth the vengeance ! He shall wash his footsteps in the blood of the ungodly ! "

Many pious laymen, indeed, are pained and shocked to be required to use such words, as if in reading the alternate verses of a Psalm we were actually committed to the use of such language ourselves, or to the approval of it as used by any one. On the contrary, a true Christian, when he thoughtfully reads to himself, or repeats in the public worship of the Church, these fierce words, will regard them as signs of human infirmity, and will bless God for the Divine Lessons of Forgiveness and Love, which have been taught by the lips of Jesus of Nazareth—which have been taught by him, not in word only, but in act, in life, and in death. He will not judge harshly his brother man, for the words uttered under the sanction of that Law, which said to them of old—

" Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy."

But he will rejoice in the light, which has gladdened his own eyes through Christ's blessed ministry, which has revealed to us the Great God as our Father, and all our fellowmen as brethren,—which has summed up for us our rule of action towards those who have most wronged us in this command—

" But I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you, that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven."

And so with regard to the (so-called) Athanasian Creed, —though, indeed, as I have formally explained, it is merely the composition of some unknown author,—probably of a French monk about the middle of the 5th century,—and has no more right to be spoken of as " the Creed of St. Athanasius," than the Apostolic Creed, that is, the Creed of the (so-called) Apostolic Church (of Rome), has to be called

“the Apostles’ Creed.” There are expressions in it which bear, as we feel, the stamp of the harsh and intemperate age in which it was written, when men were too ready, on account of some dogmatic difference, to consign one another to endless perdition; and at one moment one triumphant party excommunicated their opponents as heretics, and soon after the latter, finding themselves in the majority, very heartily repaid the anathema. That French monk of the fifth century, or any other great divine or body of divines, in any age, might indeed have done well in setting down in plain terms those articles of belief, which were commonly received by all true Catholic Christians, at least, by those that were considered to be such in that day. We do not find fault with the attempt to frame a Creed or system of belief, a “summary,” as Bishop Watson says, “of what their compilers believe to be true, either in natural or revealed religion,”—provided only that it is not sought to enforce the reception of these tenets, on pain of perdition, on all men of all times,—that no individual Christian, whether laic or cleric, no monk or bishop, church or council, attempts to bind the consciences of all mankind to all future ages, by compelling assent to any statement of the “Catholic Faith,” however true in itself, by such words as those—

Which Faith except everyone do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly; this is the Catholic Faith, which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved.

How different from this, as I have said, is the language of Paul and Silas in the text—

“Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house”!

And, if we feel that our hearts respond more entirely to the latter words than to the former,—if we feel that these last breathe the spirit of the Gospel, the spirit of Christianity, while those damnatory clauses breathe only the spirit of a dogmatic Church system,—let us thank God for this sign that we are nearer in heart and mind to the Founder of our faith than they were in that fifth century, more truly one in spirit with him. There are, indeed, at this very moment, I believe,—as there certainly were but a short while ago,—not a few of the clergy of our Church, who never read the Athanasian Creed, who habitually omit it on the days when it is, by the present law of the Church, appointed to be “sung or said,” without any reproof from their bishop, or complaint from their congregation. Such clergymen pro-

bably suppose that some of those laws, laid down in our rubrics two centuries ago, under one of which this Creed is to be read, might with advantage be relaxed or modified, in presence of the more charitable spirit, or the changed circumstances, of our own times. And, indeed, the dogmatic violence of these harsh clauses was far better suited to the age, when our Prayer Book was last revised, and in which it was thought right to enforce full attendance at the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper by the provisions of the 22nd Canon, which says that "every Lay person is bound to receive the Holy Communion thrice every year," and "enjoins" him to do so, "*under the penalty and danger of the law*,"—in which also it was in like manner sought to enforce due attention to the other Sacrament, by ordering that an innocent infant, "dying unbaptized," should be buried with the burial of a dog. Strangely enough, however, the 68th Canon on the subject of Burial, is—at least in its language, whatever may have been intended—more charitable than the Rubric; since it directs that any clergyman who shall refuse to bury—in such manner and form as is prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer—any corpse, that is brought to the Church or Churchyard—

except the party deceased were denounced excommunicated majori excommunicatione for some grievous or notorious crime, and no man able to testify of his repentance—

'he shall be suspended by the Bishop of the diocese from his ministry by the space of three months.' Here no mention whatever is made either of infants, or of persons of any age, who may die unbaptized: and at least in the case of the former it may be assumed that they have *not*—

"been excommunicated with the greater excommunication for some grievous and notorious crime."

Sheltered under this law, a clergyman of enlightened views and a large Catholic heart, would in my opinion be perfectly justified in using the Burial Service over an unbaptized infant, if the friends desired it, though the Rubric forbids it, unless his Bishop will take upon himself the responsibility, before God and Man, of enforcing the latter. If so, however, he would be bound also to enforce that other Rubric at the beginning of the Communion Service, which enjoins—

So many as intend to be partakers of the Holy Communion shall signify their names to the Curate, at least some time the day before—

a rubric which, I venture to say, very few of those who are such sticklers for the letter of the law in regard to the

Burial Service, ever think of carrying out themselves, or, if Bishops, of enforcing on their clergy. Nay, we have had in very recent days, an Archbishop, in his place in Parliament, publicly declare that he would *not*, in certain cases, obey the law, which commands him to bury a corpse when brought to him—that he would take all the consequences of such disobedience. And this was said, not merely as an expression of his own private feeling and resolve, but as advice which he had given, backed up by his own example, to his clergy. In this case, disregard of one law was recommended, by one of the highest authorities in the Church of England, because of the changed circumstances of the times, and the lack of discipline which he lamented within the Church in the present day. On these grounds the Archbishop openly justified himself and his clergy in *refusing* to bury a corpse, though the rubric *enjoined* it: and I am not aware that he has ever retracted or modified in any way this expression of his sentiments. Surely, another Bishop may—especially when supported by the express terms of the 68th Canon—at least *equally* justify himself and his clergy, in *consenting* to bury a corpse, though the rubric may *forbid* it, by alleging also the changed circumstances of the times, that is, the spread of a larger, more charitable, more Christian, spirit in these days, which will not suffer us to believe, whatever doctors or divines may say, that an unbaptized infant's soul is less dear to its Creator than that of a baptized one, or that the mere performance of an outward rite by the hand of a midwife or of "any one present," as originally sanctioned by our own Reformers, in the Prayer-Books of Edward VI and Queen Elizabeth, and still allowed in the Roman Church, can make all the difference between one lump of clay and another,—though this, of course, does not excuse neglect, if there has been neglect, in those who have had the charge of it, and have suffered it to live and die without baptism.

It is possible, however, that many a clergyman may think it right to follow the advice and example of the Archbishop of Canterbury in respect of other rubrics, which appear unsuited to the habits and modes of thought of our own times, and may feel himself at liberty to dispense with a strict obedience to them, unless required by his Ordinary to render it. This, in fact, is the case very generally, I imagine, with reference to the first rubric before the Communion Service, which I just now quoted, or that which orders the

collection of Easter Dues, or that which prescribes that Holy Baptism shall always be administered—

either immediately after the last Lesson at Morning Prayer, or else immediately after the last Lesson at Evening Prayer—

or that which directs that—

The Curate of every Parish shall diligently upon Sundays and Holy-Days—not Sundays only, but Saints' Days also—*after the second Lesson at Evening Prayer, openly in the Church* instruct and examine so many Children of his Parish sent unto him, as he shall think fit, in some parts of the Catechism—

or that which enjoins the reading of the Athanasian Creed. For myself, so long as the law of the Church prescribes the reading of this Creed, I think it good to use it, if only to make us feel from time to time the strong contrast which is here presented between the Christianity of the fifth century and that of the nineteenth,—yes, and I trust, the nearer approximation of the latter to that of the primitive age, when dogmatic creeds and damnatory clauses were unknown,—when the pure in heart and life, the true and loving in word and deed, the meek and lowly, the patient, and long-suffering, and selfsacrificing,—those who returned blessings for curses, and charitable prayers for despiteful usage,—were heartily welcomed as followers of Christ, were pronounced by the lips of Jesus himself to be the true “children of their Father in heaven,”—and when the apostle in the text could sum up in a very few simple words the creed of the Church, could say to the trembling gaoler, who asked in his distress, “Sirs, what must I to be saved?”—

“Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.”

Here, then, we find no statement of dogmatic articles, no nice distinctions expressed in abstruse terms, which must be received and “faithfully believed” by the appealing penitent on pain of everlasting perdition, but simply belief in the Lord Jesus Christ—such a belief as shall lead to that faithfulness of life, which Christ himself pronounced to be “blessed.” To believe thus is described by St. John in general terms, as believing “the record”—

“that God hath given to us Eternal Life, and this Life is in His Son.”

It is to believe that from our faithful Creator, our heavenly Father, the Fountain of all Goodness, has flowed forth a stream of spiritual blessing through the ministry, in the life and death, of Jesus. In other ways, by other ministers, has He sent His Living Word—“the Light,” “the true Light, which lighteneth every man that cometh into the world,”—to gladden the eyes and quicken the hearts of His children.

"At sundry times and in divers manners" has He spoken to them by His Prophets, their fellowmen and brethren, in all ages. But the Son of Man has been His chief messenger, whose teaching has been the germ, from which, nourished by the perpetual dews of heaven, assimilating every element of goodness and truth from every quarter, from all religions, from all the gracious, the glorious, revelations of God's Truth to man, has sprung up that plant divine, whose leaves are for the healing of the nations, and whose branches shall one day cover the wide earth.

Yes! we know that the Father has spoken to us by the lips of Jesus. Man is God's child, and the hearts of all men answer to the call of God's Spirit, whenever that call has reached them. No miracles or signs are needed to assure us that it is the Father who speaks to us in every word of Eternal Truth which Jesus uttered, the Father who "dwelt in him," who "gave not to him the Spirit by measure." To those living utterances all hearts answer, even half unconsciously and unawares, bearing witness that "he, whom God hath sent, speaketh the words of God."

But to "believe in the Lord Jesus Christ" includes also the belief that one special part of his Divine Mission was to *reveal the Father* to us. Man, in his highest aspect, as I have said, is the child of the everlasting Father,—of Him whose name is Light, is Love, but of whose nature and attributes we must still have been for ever ignorant, if they had not been revealed to us in our own human nature, by what we see and know of purity and truth and goodness in ourselves and others, and above all by what was manifested in the life and death of Jesus. In him we see how God can love—how God can forgive sin, can embrace the penitent, can soothe the mourner, can strengthen and cheer those who are faithful and true of heart, those who "hunger and thirst after righteousness," those who "are persecuted for righteousness' sake." In him the Father has poured out, as it were, His Love upon us, in one unceasing stream of grace and pity, throughout the whole of his earthly ministry. And to "believe in Jesus" is to realize this fact, and rejoice in the revelation which his life and death have brought to us, of the nature and character, the loving-kindness towards us, of our Father in Heaven.

But in Jesus also,—that is, in that ideal which each devout mind forms of him from the scanty records of his

life, enlarged and supplemented by the pious thought of ages,—we have also the purest exhibition of man as the Son of God. We think of him as perfectly obedient to the Divine Will, perfectly devoted in love and trust to the Heavenly Father, as well as perfectly full of tenderness and truth towards all his brethren. ‘Why,’ have some said,—‘Why should we bow before an obscure man, one of a subject race, a race not irradiated with the light of genius, the knowledge which is power, which was the inheritance of other peoples,—who lived a lowly life, a life of poverty, and died a felon’s death?’ But behold! that life has taught us all what a true human life should be; that death, surrounded by disgrace, has been for near two thousand years the ground of hope for multitudes, high and low, rich and poor, learned and sunk in almost brutish ignorance,—because they loved him, as manifesting forth a true brother’s heart in that life and that death,—because they believed that he loved them, and that the Father, in whose name he came, whose word he spake, with whose spirit he was filled, loved them assuredly since Jesus loved them.

Yes! we know that all history converges to the point when Jesus Christ was born, and starts afresh from it, when “the fulness of the time was come,” and “God sent forth His Son Jesus, made of a woman, made under the Law”—of human birth and Jewish descent—“that we might receive the adoption of sons.” Whether men “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,” or not, this fact is one which cannot be gainsaid. But for us, Christians, believers in Christ, followers of Christ, the name of Jesus is now the summing up of all that is most Divine in Man,—not of those virtues or those powers, with which some are endowed and of which others are left bare, such as genius, memory, fancy, imagination, but of that which makes man to be man, and not a mere animal. Conscious rectitude of purpose, trust in the Living God, habitual regard and reverence for the voice of conscience, kindness of heart towards all men, tender love and pity for the fallen and the lost, self-devotion and self-sacrifice, when needed, for the sake of others,—these are the jewels in the Crown of Christ, as we all conceive of him: these are the blossoms which make its thorns glorious, which could not have come to perfection except on that thorny branch, which could not have been developed without suffering. Whatever criticism may do with the documents relating

to him,—*must* do, as God's servant, as a minister of truth,—it will never take from us this pure ideal, which they have helped us to realize,—this image of a perfect man, perfectly obedient, perfectly loving, the perfect type of our Humanity, with which the Father is well pleased, as the counterpart in Man of His own Divine Perfection, the bright reflex of His own invisible glory, and for the sake of which He receives us all, the whole human race in its progress towards perfection, as already perfect in His Sight, who sees the end from the beginning, "accepted in the Beloved."

We believe, then, that Jesus came to manifest God's Fatherly Love to us, and to manifest also that brotherly love, which should exist between the children of God's Great Family, which should be ever flowing out from one member of the race to another. And soon we shall celebrate his birth at Christmas time, as the bringer of light and life to us all, to Jews and Gentiles alike, to all men everywhere, who were waiting and longing for some clear voice out of the upper heavens, some comforting, heart-assuring word from their Father's presence, some bright manifestation of the Glory and Goodness of God—of that Goodness, which *is* His Glory. And believing in him, and his divine message from the Father, we know that we are pleasing God who sent him. Following him and his blessed example, we know in ourselves that we have eternal life, that we are saved,—not from God's fiery wrath and from the pit of woe, it is not this we shall be dreading or thinking of,—but from our Father's just displeasure, from sin, and spiritual death, and the power of evil, from whatsoever can really harm us.

And not we only, but all we loved, are embraced in this salvation: "thou shalt be saved, and thy house," says the apostle. There is no stinted narrowing here of God's Mercies, no refusal of them to the unbaptized, or even to the unconverted. The Philippian gaoler, indeed, in the text, to whom these words were spoken, was 'baptized,' we are told, "he and all his straightway." But the promise is made contingent on his *believing*—not on his being baptized; his baptism was a sign and seal of that grace, which was given to him when yet unbaptized,—and not to him only, but to "his house," to every member of his family. They were all embraced in the faith of one. Not their baptism—not their conversion—not *their* belief—but *his* belief—is the ground, on which is here based the promise, "thou shalt be

saved, and thy house." If the father of the family, the master of the house, was embraced in God's Love, so also was every member of it: God's Fatherly Arms are stretched out wide to embrace us all. Oh! yes, for not only is it true that, "if the root be holy, so also are the branches,"—that, if the parent's heart has once been poured out in prayer and pious hope for his children, He who has taught that parent's heart to love will not disappoint its longings,—for "the gifts and calling of God are without repentance," He never revokes altogether a blessing He has given, though He may suspend it; but before that parent loved its child, God loved it,—before that child was born, and God "breathed into its nostrils the breath of life," God numbered it with those whom He beholds in His Son, and accepts in the Beloved. Every prayer which Jesus offered in the days of his flesh for the sinful and sorrowing sons of men,—every pang which rent his loving heart for his brethren,—every sigh, which burst from him, when he looked upon their sufferings, when he felt the burden of their sins,—was a token of God's Love, not to one or a few only of the sons of men, but to all. And all *our* prayers for one another, our love to one another, are all witnesses, in their measure, of the Father's Love to all—that all-abounding Spring, from which each little rill of human love is flowing. God cannot be partial in His Love: He cannot love one child of man and hate, or utterly neglect, another. If He loves one of the great human family, *His* family, He loves them all, however various may be the gifts which He is pleased in His Wisdom to bestow upon them, however various the work for which He has seen good to fit them. The faith and love of one is an assurance of the favour of God, the Faithful Creator, from whom that power to believe and love proceeds, not only to that one, but to all, to "all the house," of which he is a member, to all the great Family of Man, to which he belongs. It is a proof that all, whatever be their present condition, through whatever wondrous ways of God's Wisdom the work may in due time be perfected, in this world or in the next, are yet "saved" in the purpose of God, and embraced in the great designs of His Fatherly Love.

Only let us remember to walk worthy of this high calling, with which we are called, to be the "sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty." St. Paul, perhaps, when he "spake

the word of the Lord" unto this Philippian gaoler, "and to all that were in his house," set forth to them the expectation, which he himself at that time cherished, of the speedy coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven, even in the lifetime of men then living, to judge both the quick and the dead. We know that in this particular view he was mistaken. Still, assuredly, the word which Christ has spoken, the word of truth, will judge us in the great day of account, whenever or however that day shall be revealed. Sons and daughters though we are of the Living God—and because we are such—we shall not go unchastened, in this world and in the next, if we wilfully transgress our Father's Will,—if we are false to that which we know to be our duty, and therefore also our true blessedness, however that duty may be brought home to our consciences, by the light of the Bible or without it. Let us consider, as St. Paul says in this day's epistle, that "it is a very small thing that we should be judged of one another": but "He that judgeth us is the Lord"—

"who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the heart. And then—in that day—shall every man have praise of God"—

have *his* praise, as the words should be rendered, his just proportion of praise, his righteous meed of praise or of blame, of reward, or, if need be, of chastisement.

"Wherefore, we receiving a kingdom that cannot be moved, let us have grace whereby we may serve God acceptably, with reverence and godly fear; for our God is a Devouring Fire."

A SERMON

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. PETER'S, MARITZBURG,

On Sunday Morning, December 23, 1866,

BY THE

RIGHT REVEREND THE LORD BISHOP OF NATAL.

JOHN i. 26, 27. *John answered them saying, 'I baptize with water; but there standeth one among you whom ye know not. He it is, who coming after me is preferred before me, whose shoe's latchet I am not worthy to unloose.'*

IN other passages of scripture we seem to have an indication of some feeling of despondency or doubt, which came over the mind of John the Baptist in his prison. In former days he had been bold and resolute in pointing out Jesus to the multitudes, as the Messiah for whom they were so eagerly looking, in preparation for whose coming they were hastening in such crowds to his baptism. Shut up in prison, however, feeling his own work, his own preaching, cut short in its very midst by the strong arm of the oppressor, it would seem that he began to doubt whether what had appeared to him the time for God's own Arm to be bared were really so,—whether he had not been mistaken, deceived by his own devout fancy, his patriotic, pious hopes, in thinking that God's kingdom was near at hand, and he himself the herald of it. And so he began to hesitate about Jesus, whom in happier times he had recognised as greater than himself, as not a herald of that kingdom only, but the very king, the Messiah himself:—

“And he sent two of his disciples, and said unto him, Art thou he that should come, or do we look—are we to look—for another?”

When a man has been actively engaged, like John the Baptist, in some great work, of which he has borne the

principal part, and of which he has hoped to see the completion even in his own lifetime, it is natural that he should feel some pain, some doubt, some distrust as to the triumph of the cause so dear to him, when he himself is laid aside. It is natural to have this feeling, but not therefore always necessary or right, if we have ourselves a firm conviction in the truth and goodness of our cause, and a firm trust in the presence of the Living God, the God of Truth, among us, in the moral and spiritual, as well as the physical, world. We may be sure that, whatever is really good and true in the end we have had in view, will be accomplished in God's own time and way, with or without our ministry; though much, perhaps, which we had thought of the greatest moment, which we had supposed to be essential for the accomplishment of God's great purposes, which we in our ignorance and shortsightedness had even identified with them, may pass away unrealized, a mere dream of our own fancy, the "baseless fabric of a vision."

And so it often happens that men, like John the Baptist, good and true men, earnest and faithful, find their best plans thwarted, their warmest expectations disappointed. And then the purity and strength of their faith is tried. Is it indeed the cause of God,—is it the cause of truth and goodness,—in other words, is it the cause of man, that we have really at heart? Are the aspirations of our souls, and the efforts of our lives, directed simply to this end, regardless of our own personal interest, the success or failure of our own individual share in the work? Knowing that God is the Great Husbandman, who will gather all the wheat into His garner, are we willing to work on patiently from day to day, with or without the outward tokens of His blessing,—

"in the morning sowing our seed, and in the evening withholding not our hand, as knowing not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good"—

as knowing not whether we shall eat the fruit of our deeds of faithfulness in this life or in the next?

Yet still we crave, if it be God's Will, to see the right way prosper, to see the truth prevail, even in this world, even by our poor agency. It is grief and pain to all true hearts, when wickedness and falsehood appear to have the upper hand for a season,—when the knowledge of God our Father seems about to be blotted from the earth by the gross vapours of ignorance and superstition,—when even

His visible Church seems likely to be made a den of unclean creatures,—when the old cry of the prophet of Judah seems once more about to be realized in the history of their own days,—

“The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means, and my people love to have it so.”

It seems a weary thing to wait God’s time, for the triumph of the truth, although they know His time must be the best, the only right, time for the Light to shine forth brightly again, more bright and clear than ever. But where will *they* be when the good time shall come? Their hearts yearn towards their own kind, and long to see the salvation of God appear amongst them.

Do you remember how, from his prison-cell, the martyr Ridley poured out his sorrowful lament over the change of religion in England?

Alas! what misery is Thy Church brought unto, O Lord, at this day! . . . Of late, all that were endued with light of grace, of understanding God’s holy mysteries, did bless God who had brought them out of that horrible blindness and ignorance, whereby in times past . . . they believed that the sacrament was not the sacrament, but the thing itself whereof it is a sacrament, that the creature was the Creator, and that the thing which has neither life nor sense was the Lord himself. But now, alas! England is returned again like a dog to her own vomit, and is in a worse case than ever she was; for it had been better never to have known the truth, than to forsake the truth once received and known. . . . Yea, and at every poor bishop’s hand and suffragan’s, ye shall have hallowing of Churehes, Chapels, Altars, Super-Altars, Chalices, and of all the whole household stuff and adornment, which shall be used in the Church after the Romish manner; for all these things must be esteemed of such high price, that they may not be done but by a consecrated bishop only. O Lord, all these things are such as thy apostles never knew. As for conjuring (they call it hallowing, but it is conjuring indeed) of water and salt, of ehristening of bells, and such like things, what need I to speak? For every priest, that can but read, hath power, they say, not only to do that, but also hath such power over Christ’s body, as to make both God and man, once at least every day, of a wafer cake! . . . Furthermore, when I consider whom our Saviour Christ pronounceth in his Gospel to be blessed, . . . what is that faith that justifieth before God, and what is that charity that doth pass and excel all, what be the properties of heavenly wisdom, and which is that undefiled religion which is allowed of God, which things Christ himself calleth the weighty matters of the law . . . when I say, I consider all these things, . . . it may be evident and easy to perceive that these two ways, these two religions, . . . are as far distant the one from the other as light and darkness, good and evil. . . . Alas! England, alas! that this heavy plague of God should fall upon thee! Alas! my dearly beloved country, what thing is it now that may do thee good? Undoubtedly thy plague is so great, that it is utterly incurable, but by the bottomless merey and infinite power of Almighty God.

With these sad thoughts preying upon his mind, no wonder is it that at times this blessed martyr felt his own faith begin almost to fail him—faith in his own constancy,

not in the truth and loving-kindness of his God ; no wonder that he wrote in his prison—

I suppose I am the weakest, many ways, of our company ; and yet I thank our Lord God and Heavenly Father by Christ, that since I heard of our dear brother Rogers' departing, and stout confession of Christ and his truth, even unto the death, my heart (blessed be God) rejoiced at it,—that since that time (I say) I never felt any heaviness in my heart, as I grant I have felt sometimes before.

Yes! it must needs try the strength and purity of our faith to see our own work to all appearance overthrown, as in Ridley's case, or at least cut short before its completion, as in John the Baptist's. The voice within us, which called us to be up and doing, which said day by day, "Go! work to-day in my vineyard," was that a delusion? Did we not go at its bidding, and throw our whole hearts and lives into what seemed to us God's Work? And has it come to this?

Is this the end of all our care?

Is this the end? Is this the end?

Such, no doubt, have been the thoughts of many of God's servants, when stopped in their career by adversity, or when perhaps death stared them in the face. We know that in the garden Jesus himself shuddered at what was before him, and on the cross felt himself for a moment forsaken seemingly by God. And the most devoted followers of Jesus in every age—the true sons of God—may be liable, like John the Baptist, to seasons of dejection, when all outward things seem to fail them. Happy is it for us that our own feelings are not the measure of the reality in such cases. Jesus upon the Cross was not left alone, though all seemed to have deserted him,—all the multitudes that had so lately crowded around him to hear his word, or had gone before and followed his steps with shouts of triumph, when hailing him as the promised Son of David, the Blessed One that came in the name of the Lord. It is true, about that Cross there lingered only a few faithful women, a few attached, but hesitating, heart-broken followers. But presently that name, which had been cast out among men, went forth in God's due time, "conquering and to conquer." It is true, in that bitter hour, the cry of anguish burst from the sufferer's lips,—“My God! my God! why hast Thou forsaken me?” But the Everlasting Arm was under him still, and he breathed his last breath out upon his Father's bosom—

“Father! into Thy Hands I commend my spirit.”

And so, we may be sure, will it be with us all, in our time of need, if we are true disciples in heart and life of him, who has "gone before us, leaving us an example that we should follow his steps." It is enough for us to know that God is for us, though all things be against us.

Now, however, in the text, John the Baptist is very bold. He speaks of Jesus confidently as—

"one mightier than himself, whose shoe's latchet he is not worthy to unloose."

The signs of moral and spiritual grandeur, in the character and lives of the greatest of men, pass often unnoticed before the eyes of the low and sordid, the worldly and sensual; but they are seen and felt by kindred spirits. So Mary, from the few faint traces left of her, seems to have had some sympathy at least with her glorious son; although another passage tells us that "his brethren believed not on him," and Jesus himself says,—

"A prophet is not without honour, *save* in his own country and in his father's house."

But his cousin, John the Baptist, being himself a Prophet, taught of God, discerned, it seems, the heavenly character of him, who was to be, in an eminent degree, the Mediator between God and Man, the Messenger to bring God's words of hope to Man, the Minister to bring Man's wandering heart to God. John did not, indeed, disparage or depreciate his own mission. He spoke of himself as one who had been long foretold, as that "voice," of which the ancient seer had spoken, which cried in the wilderness to prepare the way of the Lord. He felt an inward impulse to call his countrymen to repent and amend their ways, because a new message from on high was on its way to this dim world,—a message not confided to himself, but to another greater than he,—the message of God's Fatherly Love to all, even to the distant wanderers from His Fold, the Gospel of forgiving Love, to be preached to every creature. John seems to have had a glimpse even of this far-reaching extent of that heavenly message, when he said, as we heard last Sunday—

"Behold the Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world!"

Or, if these words are not really his, but express the thought of a later age, which is ascribed to him, yet some such idea of the universality of God's Love in the Gospel must have been present to his mind, though as yet, perhaps, only faintly glimpsed at,—he must have seen that God's Mercies

were not to be confined to those who claimed to be "children of Abraham" merely by natural descent,—when he said to the Jews who came to his baptism—

"Think not to say within yourselves, 'We have Abraham to our father'; for I say unto you that God is able out of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham."

But we see in John the true modesty of a great soul,—not the fanatical self-annihilation of the monk or hermit,—but rather, what the apostle afterwards enjoins, the modesty which thinks not basely, meanly, disparagingly, of one's-self,—but '*not more highly than one ought to think*,'—which thinks "soberly," with due respect to one's-self and others, which acknowledges heartily the superior gifts of another, wherever they exist, without refusing to acknowledge also the gifts, which the same God has bestowed upon us for the good of all.

In what sense, then, was Jesus, as a Prophet, greater than John? To what did Jesus himself appeal as the best and surest proofs of his Messiahship? We heard in the Gospel of last Sunday the message which he sent in reply to John's enquiry—"Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them. And blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in me."

It is common to suppose that our Lord in these words was referring to some actual miracles, which he then and there performed in the sight of John's disciples; and in St. Luke's Gospel, indeed, an account of such wonders, performed in their presence, immediately precedes this passage. To me it seems more probable that our Lord was really referring to the well-known words of the prophet Isaiah:—

"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
And the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.
Then shall the lame man leap as an hart,
And the tongue of the dumb shall sing;
For in the wilderness shall waters break out,
And streams in the desert." Is.xxxv.5,6.

Such words as these, describing in the figurative language of poetry the glorious joy that would overflow the land under the reign of the Messiah, point evidently to *spiritual*, not to *bodily*, cures. And to these it is probable that Jesus himself referred, as he did, for instance, when he read from the book

of Isaiah those other words of prophecy, which express almost the very same idea:—

“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord.”

Here, manifestly, he is speaking of those who are spiritually “captives” and “blind” and “bruised,” and who shall be delivered by the preaching of the Gospel of God’s Love from the power of sin and death. So in another place he speaks of those who are spiritually “dead” being “raised up” by him, even now in this present life:—

“Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, *hath everlasting life*, and shall not come into condemnation, but is *passed from death unto life*. Verily, verily, I say unto you, *The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live.*”

And, indeed, it can hardly be supposed that Jesus would have spoken to the disciples of John of their seeing and hearing how the dead were raised up by him, if he meant to speak of the miraculous restoration to life of dead corpses, when only one such a miracle is recorded to have been wrought by him previously to their arrival, and none at all in their actual presence. It is very probable, however, that this figurative language of the ancient prophets, as well as that which Jesus himself, as we have seen, so frequently employed, may have given rise to many of those stories of miraculous cures of bodily diseases, which in after days were very freely grafted upon the history of his life, as we see very plainly by the apocryphal books. Accordingly, it is noticeable that in the two chief passages which I have quoted, both referring to parts of the prophet Isaiah, the employment of “preaching the Gospel to the poor” stands as a kind of summary of the whole work, that would characterize the Messiah at his coming. In one of them it stands *first*, and is then expanded into the different branches of evangelical labour:—

“He hath anointed me to *preach the Gospel to the poor*, He hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovery of sight to the blind, &c.”

In the other it stands *last*, and it then sums up the various parts of the Saviour’s work:—

“The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and *the poor have the Gospel preached to them,*”

It was the characteristic feature, then, of the life of Jesus, that he spent his time in healing diseases of the soul of every kind, in instructing the ignorant, supporting those that were tottering and stumbling in the way of life, helping those that were faint and feeble and ready to fall, opening the eyes of the blind to divine truth, raising the dead in sin to a divine life. In one word, comprehending all, the clearest, most convincing, sign of his Messiahship, according to himself, was given in this, that he was ever occupied in "preaching the Gospel to the poor," to the poor in spirit, to those hungering and thirsting after the bread and water of life. The disciples were to go and tell John this. And thus he would be able to answer his own question for himself,—“Was this the Messiah, the Anointed One of God, or not?” Doubtless, this was *not* such a Messiah as John had once looked for. Here were no outward signs of royalty,—no tokens of the setting up as yet of God's Kingdom, with visible pomp and glory, such as, in connexion with the most devout of his age, he had been earnestly expecting. Here was nothing corresponding to his own strong language, when he described beforehand the Messiah's coming, as that of one—

“Whose fan should be in his hand, and he would thoroughly purge his floor, and gather his wheat into the garner, but would burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire.”

But, with that “honest and good” heart of his, let him ponder these things, and say if a life like this, of constant, unceasing labour for the glory of God and the good of men, of holy, self-sacrificing love, was not the true life of the Son of God. “This cursed people, who knew not the law,” as the Scribes and Pharisees contemptuously called them,—who cared little for the ritual of the priest, little for the traditionary dogmas of the Scribe,—hung yet in crowds upon the lips of one, who spoke to them of divine things, of the love of the Almighty Father to all, of His pardoning mercy for the world, of His care and providence over the least, of the love which they owed, as God's children, to one another.

“And blessed is he,” said Jesus, “whosoever shall not be offended in me!” Many *were* offended at him. He not only made no pretensions to a high place amongst men, to power or rule, to wealth or grandeur; but, when they would have come by force to make him a king, he “departed into

a mountain himself alone." Thus he disappointed altogether the hopes of those, who were looking for a Messiah, a Son of David, to deliver them from the yoke of Cæsar, to put the nations under their feet, to make Jerusalem the city of the Great King, and a visible glory in the midst of the earth. "Is not this the carpenter's son?" they said:—

"Is not his mother called Mary? and his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things? And they were offended in him."

And, now, although the name of Jesus has for centuries been exalted high above all other names, and his words have been the food and medicine and cordial of generation after generation, men are looking back to the historic origin of Christianity, and some wonder and some despise its small beginnings, lost now almost beyond research in the haze of far distant years, and obscured with a mass of traditionary matter, which makes it difficult to make out distinctly the features of the original narrative. Yet, truly—

"the weakness of God is stronger than men, and the foolishness of God is wiser than men."

The essential truths of Christianity, which Jesus preached and sealed with his blood,—that revelation of the Father which he brought to us,—will never die. They are God's message to man by his lips; and God cannot deny himself. He will not recall His own words, which His Spirit taught the heart of the Son of Man to utter, and ours to receive, as the very "Bread of God," the "flesh and blood" of Christ's Divine Doctrine, which "giveth life to the world."

Some are afraid lest researches into the history and origin of the Gospels, into the Life of Christ, viewed, as it has been, of late years, by so many writers from so many different points of view, may end in sweeping away our Christianity altogether, and leaving us with a few religious ideas only, which we might equally find in any other religious system. But should we deny the actual existence of a mighty river, which we see flowing before our eyes, or the blessings which it pours upon surrounding lands, because it rises in some distant desert, where the foot of man can hardly follow it to track it, or because, when the source is found, it seems but a small insignificant spring, whose waters have been swelled by affluents from a thousand other sources, till there rolls a mighty volume towards the sea? Doubtless, if Christianity consisted in maintaining a system of dogmas, which require

to be based upon an infallible Book or an infallible Church, there might well be ground for fear, lest the investigations of the present day should show the utter fallacy of much, which in former days of ignorance, of unenquiring indolence, and blind acquiescence in priestly authority, was supposed to be incontrovertible, unquestionable, truth. But if Christianity is a life, the striving to live in the spirit of Christ, to grow more like him, more pure and holy, more full of love to God and Man,—if by Christianity we mean that faith which Jesus taught, and in the exercise of which he lived and died, which realizes constantly the idea of God as a Father, not sitting in Majesty unapproachable, hidden from men's eyes, but communing with them by His Spirit, enlightening them by His Word, manifesting Himself to them, His “Invisible things,” His “Eternal Power and Godhead,” by the things which He has made—revealing Himself to them, His Truth and Goodness, His Faithfulness and tender Pity and Love, in human acts, in the words and deeds of the Son of Man, but also, in their measure, in those of all true Christians in every age,—if Christianity consists in this recognition of the Fatherhood of God and of the Brotherhood of Man, and of this revelation of God in Man, going on through all the ages, becoming brighter and brighter, more complete, more perfect, as, to use once more those words of a great living statesman, it “associates with, and makes its own”—

all, under whatever name, which goes to enrich and enlarge the patrimony of the human race—

then this Christianity assuredly will never die; from age to age it will be continually newborn, as thank God! it is in the present day, and will gather ever fresh strength and splendour till “the end shall come.” Whatever myths may surround the birth and the life on earth of Jesus, he lives amongst us still as Guide and Teacher, yes, as King and Leader of the Host of God, of a vast band of trusting, loving hearts, of those who do the Will of their Father, and lay down their lives for their brethren.

For who are his true followers,—who are those that say with the apostle, “As he was, so are we in this world,”—but those, however lowly and unpretending, who live a life of constant filial affiance towards God, and of self-denying, tender pity towards men,—seeing even in the most unworthy a sheep of the Good Shepherd, a child of the Divine Parent,

—enduring meekly for God's sake, and with the cross of Christ in mind, all the perverseness, all the hostility, of men? Are not these in very deed true Christians, even though they may not be able to repeat creeds or subscribe articles,—even though their intellect may not be trained to the subtle distinctions of the different schools of dogmatic theology? To what cause can the most searching and sceptical criticism trace the conscious subjection of generations of living men and women to such principles as these, but to the teaching and example of him who lived in Jewry eighteen centuries ago? Still, as ever, we can answer to the enquiry, “Was this he that should come—the Messiah of God—the Messenger from God to Man?”—whether asked by a loving heart, like John's, in a temporary eclipse of faith, or asked in a hostile cavilling spirit,—by pointing to the practical results of Christianity, not such as doctors and divines have made it, but such as it flowed at first from its source. Still can we say:—

“The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.”

If criticism fails to discover the Divine Mission of the Son of Man amongst old documents or mouldy stones, yet “believe the works”—the working of the pure Gospel in the history of man. See how the heavenly truths which Jesus taught,—those words of his which shall never die,—have forced their way again and again, like living waters, through the dark heaps of traditionary rubbish, the accumulating corruptions of ages,—an under-current sometimes, hid from sight, but bursting forth again still purer and clearer, more the creed of all humanity, with every reformation, with every step of human progress. And remember what Jesus himself has said,—

“Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women, there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding, he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.”

If Jesus himself is greater than John, so also are all his true followers. The least of them is greater—in union with Christ, is nearer to the fount of Truth and Purity, nearer to the vision of God,—than the greatest of all that went before him, who had not yet seen “the glory of God revealed in the face of Jesus Christ,”—had not beheld that Divine beauty, and, gazing with devout love upon it, been “changed” in their measure “into the same image, from glory to glory.”

